United Nations E/2004/NGO/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 April 2004

Original: English

Substantive session of 2004
New York, 28 June-23 July 2004
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Resource mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Statement submitted by the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 35 July 1996.

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04-32582 (E) 270504

Introduction

It is a great honor for CONGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, to have been requested to submit the draft declaration of this NGO Forum for input into the Ministerial Declaration of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment (HLS).

Let me also express my gratitude to the ECOSOC Secretariat for encouraging NGOs, for the fourth consecutive year, to organize such a Forum. I particularly welcome the timely venue: gathering three months before the HLS should ensure that our recommendations indeed flow into the Ministerial Declaration. If last year we have been able to present to the HLS our recommendations, this year we hope to go one step further and influence the Ministerial Declaration itself.

And let me at the outset say that we welcome the interconnected and holistic way in which the United Nations, and ECOSOC in particular, now addresses comprehensively the development agenda and focuses through its various organs on different aspects and perspectives.

The history of UN-NGOs relations is an evolving one and this progression of our contributions proves how important our views and the input from Civil Society Organization (CS0)s are to an organization such as the UN.

For over 50 years, CONGO has actively promoted and facilitated the participation and involvement of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in the work of the United Nations. Today, we are reaching out to NGOs around the world, in particular from developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDC), to further strengthen their presence at the United Nations and facilitate their efforts to relate more effectively to the important matters treated in United Nations fora.

In the process of these consultations, we heard NGOs voicing serious concerns about the risk that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be met at the current pace of commitment. NGOs formulated suggestions and recommendations in terms of what governments ought to do in order to revert this negative trend and we listened to them very carefully. Today we have the privilege to echo their voices at this Forum.

Some of the recommendations result from last year's NGO Forum preceding the ECOSOC HLS, under the theme of Rural Development for Poverty Eradication. Participating NGOs from around the world - most of them from LDCs - adopted recommendations that are still very relevant to this year's theme. Other recommendations come from various consultations organized around the world and from reports prepared by NGOs in their continuous monitoring of governments' commitments and policies.

NGO/CSOs call for a people-centered approach to poverty eradication, and this applies more than ever to the countries that rank among the poorest of the poor. The people of the world call for capacity building that leads to empowerment, because

they want to become full actors of their own development. They don't want top-down approaches, neither solutions imported or imposed from outside. They want to be allowed to fully exercise their rights of participation and involvement into public affairs and be able to influence the planning and implementation of development programmes. They call for the full integration of the marginalized and the excluded, more particularly women, the youth, the elderly, people with HIVIAIDS, migrants and indigenous populations. They want more democracy and better governance at the local. national and international level.

Grassroots organizations and NGOs call for a development that is human-centered and invests in human resources: education and training and the provision of basic social services must be central to any development strategy. In the Millennium Forum Declaration - that we organized in New York almost four years ago - NGOs already called for the full implementation of the ten commitments contained in the Copenhagen Declaration and this concern with social development is reflected in the MDGs.

The Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) calls, in its first commitment, for the fostering of a people-centered policy framework. We acknowledge that, but we would like to see this people-centered approach running, as a cross cutting theme, throughout the six other commitments.

Out of the many recommendations to meet the Brussels Program of Action I have clustered five areas for your most urgent attention: - -

1. Fostering a people-centered policy framework
   This includes:
   - To invest in people by carrying out sustained capacity-building activities at the grassroots level, in order to empower the poor to become full stakeholders of their own development. This includes more particularly training in participatory decision-making processes and planning techniques;
   - Strengthen the ability of community institutions to coordinate governments and donors funds, in order to avoid competition and diversion of resources;
   - Create and guarantee decent employment .

2. Establish an enabling environment:
   This includes:

   - To establish an enabling legal environment by adopting a rights-based approach to development and poverty eradication;
   - To give an authoritative definition of what rights entail in order to ensure accountability of governments by checking actions against obligations;
   - To ensure transparency in governance matters that allows NGOs to carry out their monitoring and awareness-raising activity of Governments' commitments. This is mainly done by reviewing current

practices, prioritizing policy reforms, identifying means of policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation;

- To establish National Councils on Sustainable Development (or National Forums or Focal Points, as called for in the BPoA) made up of NGOs to advise Governments' policy. This will allow a virtuous circle of collaboration, linking grassroots action to policy formulation and debate;
- To promote decentralization in decision-making as a highly important aspect of development in particular for indigenous people. Decentralization requires a just approach to territorial boundaries, language usage, local-governance structures, communal tenure, and empowerment of local associations and communities.

3. Empower the poor and create new partnerships
   - To empower the poor by carrying out grassroots consultations to find out what poverty means for them. To allow the poor, and in particular women, to use their wisdom and experience to become their own agents of change;
   - To adopt a multidimensional approach of poverty which goes beyond economic deprivation and is defined among others in terms of powerlessness, lack of education, social exclusion, gender inequality, poor infrastructure and lack of land rights;
   - To promote community and organizational development that represents the poor, is owned by them and serves their needs. To require full citizenship rights to voice their demands and bargain for demand-driven programs;
   - To fully integrate poor people into a development framework consisting of local government, credit institutions, juridical institutions, agricultural support services, health centers, school authorities, water suppliers as well as national and regional government departments;
   - To muster political will for a shift in paradigm to a genuine bottom up approach that takes into account the special circumstances of specific groups, including indigenous peoples, women, youth and older persons. They should be involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of every project and program governments undertake on their behalf and on behalf of their communities.

4. Mobilize resources for poverty eradication
   This includes:
   - To implement the eighth MDG, which focuses on international cooperation and puts a large burden on developed countries and their potentially deleterious foreign policies;
   - To keep the state engaged in the provision of basic social services such as health, water, sanitation and electricity; to consider that trade liberalization and privatisation of such essential services are among the main obstacles to development, as they deprive the state of precious financial resources and destroy local production;

- In the context of decentralization, to make central governments aware, that they cannot abdicate their responsibility to ensure that decentralization is based on an adequate flow of resources to the local or regional institutions.

5. Increase access to assets
This includes:
   - To redress past injustices, such as skewed land distribution, as a starting point for poverty eradication, but at the same time, recognizing that poverty is multi-faceted, to address dimensions of ill-health, low levels of literacy, lack of productive assets and inadequate tools and equipment;
   - To change laws and customs to remedy women's claim to land rights and tenure other than through a male (husband, brother .) Women need reliable information as well as access to justice, notably in regard to inheritance rights;
   - To promote a rights-based approach to development. This will require some courageous political decisions: meaningful protection of access for the poor to land, water and other productive resources is likely to involve denying or reducing such access for powerful corporate interests;
   - To make access to (formal or informal) education key to development strategies. Education will later produce economic opportunities for agriculture or off-farm activities, but also overcome psychological barriers that are deeply imbedded in the life of the community. Education of girls pays a particularly high rate of return and is an especially effective tool for national development. Recognizing that as education increases, HIV/AIDS infections decrease, Kofi Annan has even written of the "education vaccine" for AIDS;
   - To give highest priority to access to clean water, including to local water access, village boreholes, community wells, and low-technology maintenance of water distribution installations. The corollary is to invest adequately in sanitation and waste disposal installation and in their upkeep.

Finally, two crosscutting themes emerged strongly and permeated all recommendations, above all:

- To promote and enhance women's role and rights to self-determination and self-expression. Women's access to justice, to education, to services, to political power mechanisms, including electoral processes, to social safety networks and to land was seen as fundamental prerequisites to development and poverty eradication. Particularly their role as entrepreneurs, grossly underdeveloped, was seen to be in need of urgent support by governments and IGOs;
- To promote and enhance poor people's access to modern information and communications technologies (ICTs). Widespread local-level access to ICT's also empowers the poor to play a fuller role in development and of course self-development.

In conclusion,

We stress the overarching need for the Ministerial Declaration or any other outcome of this Segment to move beyond nice rhetoric and point towards action in the areas we have highlighted here. Action that will ensure governments and the United Nations to

- Support and further develop technical cooperation and collaborative partnerships of civil society with the United Nations;
- Use the second phase of World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as a major opportunity to accelerate the process and facilitate earliest Implementation.